Capitol Punishment

Howard Hughes' Latest Tool

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By Art Buchwald

Minderman knocked on the door at 11 o'clock at night.

"I had to talk to you," he apologized. "Something has been driving me nuts."

"What is it, Minderman?"

"It's about the Russian submarine the CIA tried to raise from the Pacific Ocean."

Minderman tends to be slightly paranoid, but since most of his paranoia in the past has turned out to be true I have to take him seriously.

"Well," he said, "It turns out that according to all the stories the CIA was using Howard Hughes as a cover for their operations."

"That's only reasonable," I said. "Howard Hughes is a perfect front for the CIA."

"Okay," said Minderman nervously. "But suppose it's just the opposite. Suppose the CIA is really a cover for Howard Hughes. Suppose Howard Hughes owns the CIA?"

I whistled. "Wow, I never thought of that. That would make a lot more sense than what is going on right now. But why would Howard Hughes want to raise a Russian submarine?"

"He didn't want to raise a Russian submarine. He just had that story leaked to hide the real reason why he built a $350 million boat. What he really wanted the ship for was to search for rare minerals on the ocean floor."

"But that is what they announced when they first launched the ship," I said.

"Aha," said Minderman, "that is how clever Howard Hughes really is. He announced he built the boat to search for high-grade ore. Everyone pooh-poohed it, which is what he was counting on. They all assumed the real reason he invested all that money was to raise an M-68 Russian submarine which is what Howard wanted them to think in the first place.

"I believe I'm just about to lose you, Minderman," I said.

"Even the Soviets were taken in by it. They assumed from the start that Howard was after their code machine and atomic missiles. In the meantime, Hughes was raking in all kinds of minerals off the ocean floor."

"But the Soviets aren't stupid. Surely they knew that if we let the story out about raising the sub they would have to figure something else was going on."

"It was a desperation move on the part of Howard. He probably called up Colby and chewed him out, and told him to go to all the newspaper offices and warn everyone if they printed the sub story national security would be endangered. Howard was certain Jack Anderson would break it."

"Which he did," I said. "But do you have anything more concrete to support your belief that the CIA is really a front for Howard Hughes?"

"It figures," Minderman said. "The CIA is supposed to be the secret service in this country and it is always in the news. No matter where you go in Washington you run into Bill Colby. How many people ever run into Howard Hughes? Believe me, if the records are ever opened they'll find the CIA is part of the Hughes Holding Co., which owns half of Las Vegas."

"This certainly puts a new light on things."

"I'm only telling you all this," Minderman said, "in case anything happens to me. The CIA is going to be pretty mad when they discover I know they work for Howard Hughes. Look what they did to Clifford Irving."

"Do you think Irving knew Howard owned the CIA?"

"Of course he knew. Why else did they send him to jail?"

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